THE AERONAUT.

No. 109. Sep. 22. 1817.

Qualis vir, talis oratio.
SENECA.

As is the man, his works his heart proclaim.

THERE is perhaps no mistake more common, than that of substituting reading for thinking, and acquirements for intellect. This mistake is the more fatal, as, in proportion to their adherence to it, do men shut out the means of acquiring sound wisdom. Wrapped up in their fancied attainments, they have indeed all the satisfaction which vanity can bestow; but, in the midst of this illusion

we cannot but observe that all hope of improvement is cut off by their idiotic notions of superiority; and the door to amendment is closed, as well by the judgment which they have formed of their foolish vanity, as from the influence of that vanity itself upon the minds of its possessors. When men have so far prostrated their reason at the shrine of deceit, as to delight in dreams, and to be amused by the pursuit of phantoms, who will feel compassion enough to disturb their slumbers? The man of solid acquirement looks on them with pity, or contempt, but he makes no effort to break the silken cord by which they are bound. The incense which flattery offers will be far more palatable to them, than the slow, the cool, the deliberate approbation of the wise: and as soon might we expect the madman to become sane, by our

setting before him the miseries of lunacy, as that the vain, the pothy, or the desultory reader, should become attentive, wise, and modest, by representing to him the contempt to which by his folly he will be exposed.

Locke, that great master of human reason, has very justly remarked, that books are only helps to the understanding, and the instruments of acquiring knowledge. Considered simply in themselves, they are only the depositaries, not the dispensers of wisdom. It is already admitted, that they are the principal means at least, by which these are attained; but unless the reader brings them to the test of his own understanding, and by a close application of his mind to the subject discussed, is enabled to discern the truth or falsehood of the propositions laid down, he will add no more vigor to his intellect by the exercise, than an infant would of strength to his body, by attempting to grasp a bar of iron; no greater expansion of his

views than ~~would~~ the Greenlander could receive of extensive landscapes amid the snows of winter; nor would he acquire more taste for elegant composition, or polite literature, than would the Hottentot for the fine arts, by having some of the best pictures of Raffael and of Guido placed before his view, though their beauties were pointed out with all the discrimination of a Reynolds, & played upon the ear in the classical ~~xxxxx~~ numbers of a Sotheby or a Shee. The fact is, that unless men use their minds to think while reading, books will rather tend to make them pedants, than scholars; empty boasters, rather than men of sense. In such cases it is no wonder that we so often see an attempt to impose upon us their beggarly tinsel for pure gold; their declamatory nonsense for profound reasoning; and their flimsy illustrations for close investigation and deep research. Were it necessary, we could explain ourselves by a number of living instances:

But the good sense of our readers will easily mark them out. Leaving them therefore to slumber on in those visions of self-complacency, which a combination of frippery and vanity has created in their disordered imaginations, we pass on to more important considerations.

Books, like the beings who produce them, partake of all their varieties, & their excellencies & their defects. They are at once a record of the folly, and the monuments of the wisdom of their authors. They are the storehouses, into which are collected the accumulated wisdom and experience of a vast succession of years; or else, in horrid heap, they present us with the charnel house of virtue, — itself only preserved to become the receptacle of all that is vile and abominable among men. Among the ancient writers we meet with a strange mixture of high intelligence, with the most degrading opinions; of close reasoning, with silly speculations;

of the most dignified sentiments, with the most debasing pollutions; and of the finest moral rules, with the grossest violations of all moral obligation. While they press virtues upon us of one kind with all the force of their eloquence, and with all their powers of reason, they open the door to abominations, at which even our modern infidels would start with disgust; but on which the Christian cannot reflect without horror. It affords some consolation that many of those works which are most objectionable, still remain locked up in their native language accessible only to the learned; whose acuteness enables them to detect the fallacy of their systems; and whose ardor of research prevents them from being infected by the poison of their licentious pages.

If in turning to modern writers, we may consider them more pure, it is with real grief that we are obliged to admit many exceptions. The grossness and ribaldry of Ovid,

of Lucretius, and of Horace, have been but too well imitated by a Rabelais, a Rochester, and a Thomas Moore; and if with inferior ability for the work, they have not in this respect all the merit of the former, they have, we fear, been more successful in the unholy business of demoralising their fellow men. By a superior address they have more effectually insinuated their poison into the hearts of their readers; by now and then gilding the bait, it has been rendered more acceptable to the palate; & by flattering their unwary admirers, they have at last secured their prey.—

It is a commonly received maxim, that the productions of the pen are the index of the writer's mind;— that the labors of the head bear a strong resemblance to the qualities of the heart; and that imbecillity or strength, virtue or vice, boldness or timidity;— with all that exalts, or degrades the human character, may

be easily traced from the book to the man. These maxims however must be received with some limitation. Were we in every instance to look from the volume to the author, we should be miserably disappointed. Where we expected dignity, we should find meanness; where harshness & distance, mildness and courtly politeness. On the one hand, our highly excited hopes would be thrown back upon us with disgust; & on the other, where perhaps we least looked for it, pleasures of the most gratifying nature would await us.

We are too apt to imagine that the views in the closet will be the same in the man, when he is introduced into common life; and that the passions which he so easily subdued by the pen, will be found equally in subjection when called to the theatre of action: but we forget, to borrow the idea of Dr Johnson, that the man who forms moral codes in his study, is equally relieved from the influence of hope, or fear, appetites or disgusts, depression or elevation; - to the style of

dictation he there sees no obstacle. Like the teacher of navigation in a sand chamber, he has calm seas & gentle breezes. If he points to sunken rocks, to quicksands, and to whirlpools, they are only on paper; he is neither exposed to the destruction of the one, nor to the perils of the other.

It would not be difficult to adduce many proofs of the dissimilitude between an author's life and his precepts; between the character which he delineates, and that which he exhibits in his own person. Richardson, who in his Clarissa and Pamela, has drawn some of the most accurate and interesting scenes in domestic life, was a tyrant in his own family. Burke, whose genius always flashed fire, and who darted upon his antagonists with the impetuosity of a lion, was a child by his own fire-side. Bishop Newton, whose soul was cast in the softest mould, and the essence of whose character in private, was simplicity, candor, and benevolence, never lighted the torch of controversy,

without being fanned into a flame of intolerance, as disgraceful to the man, as it was inconsistent with the gentleman and the Christian. To these we would add the example of an author recently deceased, who though he has with the hand of a master, delineated the actions, and touched some of the finest springs of the human heart, was yet a spendthrift of his fortune, a trifler in his conversation, and a neglecter of his family. While with his pen he made the tear of sensibility to start, & the heart of generosity to throb, he permitted the companion of his bosom to sigh in solitude over his folly, and to suffer absolute want from his profusion!

Yet, with all the limitation which the great variety and jarring interests of the human character, will dispose us to allow, we must admit, that the maxim is, in general, correct. A man must have made great progress in the art of managing his passions, & his principles, who does not suffer the most prominent ones to peep out.

If he is sincere, no effort can conceal them; if an hypocrite, he must either possess a talent and caution seldom found among men, which enable him to hide from the penetration of his reader his real designs, & dexterously to cover the principles which he is ashamed, or afraid to avow; - or else, by that vanity, that love of novelty, and that desire of distinction, which force themselves into the most wary breasts, he will at last betray himself. ~~in the~~ In general, however, the veil is so thin as to be penetrated by the least acute of his readers; and his real intentions are so unequivocal, as at once to meet the eye of the most unobservant.

In unfolding his views, the man of real dignity, neither seeks, nor desires to impose. The glitter of the vain, the tinsel of the superficial, the shiftings of falsehood, and the windings of deceit, are all equally abhorrent to him. As he thinks, he writes. The genuine sentiments of his soul are infused into his works. He disdains to appear in any other than his native garb, whether his doctrines are obsolete, or fashionable,

rigid, or generous, homely, or splendid.— Does his soul glow with generous ardor for his country?— He transfers it faithfully to his page. Are the souls of men the prize he has in view? See with what fervor his pen glides along, teeming with expressions of the deepest concern for their eternal welfare. Is ambition his aim? He makes it evident by the plans which he unfolds, and the measures he recommends. Does science excite his attention, and demand his taking some new stand in that extensive field?— with what zeal does he venture on the boldest experiments, and with what perseverance does he explore the arcana of nature. Is the rough sea of politics his choice? He rises with every billow, & receives strength from the opposing waves. If he delights in the rugged walks of criticism, with what patience does he examine every word; with what accuracy of judgment he discriminates the style & reasoning of his author; & with what acuteness he detects the fallacy, or perceives the strength

of his argument. If his manners are rough & his temper sour, his style will partake of the tartness. If his friends and his family find him open, affable, & candid, the same spirit and temper will breathe through his productions. In a word, whatever are his follies, or his crimes; his propensities, or his aversions; his opinions, or his speculations; they will all appear, more or less, in his writings.

But it is time that we should present our readers with a few instances for the illustration of our remarks; — a task which we must defer to another opportunity.

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